



The Corset and the Hijab Absence and presence in the 19th and 20th-century Fashion System

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Introduction

The corset and the hijab : more than emblems of two societies and cultures, those two objects could perhaps be classed as being among the most evocative items of dress produced by two traditions often addressed as opposed : English and Egyptian cultures. Placing both objects and the two selected locations in parallel may seem, for some, a comparison not possible and, hence, surpassing the possibilities of the semiotic theory ; however, looking closer at both objects, not only they produce similar trajectories in time, but similar values are invested in, and manifested through them, as we hope to show.

As much as England is an epicentre of Western culture and remains a dictator of Fashion trends and a centre for the qualification of designers, Egypt, as well, is a pivot of cultural and political life in the Arab world. Similarly, while the British cling to their glorious monarchical, colonialist history, Egyptians are tied to their Pharaonic past likewise, pulled in opposing directions, also being at the forefront of the proximity with both the Arab and Western worlds¹. By presenting Egypt as a country similar to England in history and cultural influence, both nations can be placed side by side at least as a corpus to analyse the trajectories of feminine dress, while also serving to fulfil Edward Said's celebrated statement about the West and the Orient being, contrary to the prevalent discourses, reversed reflections of one another².

Both sartorial objects, traditionally and normatively worn by the woman, share more with each other than being part of the feminine wardrobe. Although it is not customary, in Fashion theory, to talk about "Fashion" as something existing outside of Western culture, this reflection aims at the argument that the transit of values that forms the rhythmic changes in Fashion systems is also shared by corset and hijab and, consequently, by the cultures producing those objects.

"Fashion is defined by change" is probably one of the most succinct illustrations of a Western obsession since the 18th century : Fashion is a mode of existence marked by correlational hierarchies — a system — which governs the alternation of different appearances periodically, through processes of erasure and renovation. Hence, the Fashion system is marked by the *punctual* aspect : the attempt to prolong the duration of a vogue is precisely the signature of the kitsch, the *demodé*, or what stayed outside of the loop of change, choosing persistence over renewal.

1 A.E. Macleod, *Accommodating Protest : Working Women, the New Veiling, and Change in Cairo*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1991.

2 E. Said, *Orientalism*, London, Vintage, 2003.

Although commonly associated with dress, Fashion dictates everything in a given culture, from food preferences to political views or religious beliefs. As different paradigms rhythmically appear and erase previous vogues, relations of durations, as well as absence and presence of the same objects or concepts become the means through which Fashion constructs meaning.

The meaning of rhythmic changes in Fashion can be observed and analysed through the apparatus of categories marking the implicit presence of an observer, that is the aspects of person (actorialisation), space (spatialisation) and time (temporalisation)³. In literature or in sartorial fashion, those markers permit the observer — the enunciatee — to locate and decompose the path and actions of actors in the narrative. When analysing Fashion through those lenses, mapping the aspects of a trajectory can assist on isolating emblematic moments of the panorama we aim at analysing, namely fashions of dress and behaviours from the late 19th to the early 21st century.

Defined by what we could perhaps name the “durativity of punctuality”, constant ruptures and renovations are the language of Fashion, which can be analysed in two manners : the cycle of one trend, or the alternation produced in a syntagmatic chain comprising of past vogues, regarded from a chronological distance. Those two modes of analysis concern both our objects, the corset and the hijab : both are subjected to subtle, yet significant alternations of different silhouettes of the body and the head of the wearer, but they are subjected also to the more often debated alternations of *absence* and *presence* of these items in Fashion.

Although both processes can be discussed in terms of sartorial manifestations of Fashion, each silhouette created by the corset and the hijab, as well as the absence or presence of such garments, can be homologated to the alternation of different femininities as well, which relates to the forms of life constructed around dress practices : the shape the female body chooses to present to another creates different meanings which simultaneously construct and reflect different conditions of women in society, as well as transformations in the roles played in the interaction between genders, or between bodies and spaces. However, it is also the case that different values present at a given era or society surface to and through sartorial objects : Fashion is not a one-way street, but both directions are possible pathways of analysis, from object to meaning, but from meaning to object likewise.

One of the grand arguments in need of deconstruction today is the one that only the West has Fashion⁴ — that claim used precisely to back the idea that Fashion is what makes the West more “civilised”, or perhaps more “advanced” than other cultures and nations, side by side with the need for other cultures to *follow* our Fashion — a view that contributed to the idea of “being Westernised” as synonymous of being “modern”, which emerges from the enduring self-image of the West as a “modern nation”⁵. Throughout History, to be Westernised was homologated to being in tune with progress, Western fashion becoming the manifestation of “future”, whereas any other form of national dress became the “past”, or tradition — a badge of backwardness and otherness.

3 Cf. A.J. Greimas and J. Courtés, *Sémiotique. Dictionnaire raisonné de la théorie du langage*, Paris, Hachette, 1979. (*Semiotics and Language : an Analytical Dictionary*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1982).

4 The common theoretical conception is mentioned in Valerie Steele, “Fashion”, *Encyclopedia of Clothing and Fashion*, New York, Scribner, 2005 ; while a similar questioning of the Western “ownership” of Fashion appears in Abby Lillethun and Linda Welters, *Fashion History : A Global View*, London, Bloomsbury, 2018.

5 Cf. L.F. Maloul, “Political Islam, Islam as faith and modernity in 1970s Egypt : a socio-political reading of Ahdag Sourif’s *In the Eye of the Sun*”, *Contemporary Levant*, 2017.

And yet, when looking at the history of headscarves in Egypt, we won't find a monolithic, constant — or *durative* — presence of the practice of veiling, as is commonly stated in dominant discourses about the Orient and its “traditional past”. Our observation of works about the history of veiling in Egypt has shown that, not only the practice was marked by the same two types of punctuality as the vogue of corsets in England, but that the dance of absences and presences at the periods we chose to analyse overlapped with the Western trajectory of the corset.

To achieve the objective of placing both Fashion systems in parallel, the key points in the “Fashion History” of the corset in England and the hijab in Egypt will be mapped through the work of authors who deeply examined the history of both objects, such as Eleri Lynn, Valerie Steele, David Kunzle⁶ ; and Leila Ahmed, Fadwa El Guindi, Arlene MacLeod and Karin Werner respectively⁷. Once mapped, the key moments in the histories of both objects will be analysed according to the hierarchy of levels composing the so-called “generative trajectory” of Greimas's semiotic theory⁸, with the aim of gauging the different markers of the objects' paths throughout the periods examined.

By working from historical writing, our analyses of both garments take the opposite direction that is practised in the examination of dress and Fashion. Rather than working from the visual manifestation to the fundamental level, the work starts from the values identified in both societies as motivations for the use of the garments, reconstructing the generative trajectory to the visual manifestations. That approach also uses the apparatus of absence and presence of both objects in their respective cultural contexts to understand how each aspect signifies in Fashion, and whether it is indeed possible to analyse the West and the Orient as one.

From the start, it is possible to gauge that, as much as the generative trajectory is multi-layered, the objects produced by Fashion similarly contain in themselves (at least) three layers : a visual and enunciative manifestation, which corresponds to the discursive level ; while the semio-narrative structures contain both the narratives of femininity and social in their different modes of relations between different actors in society ; as well as fundamental, deep values that are tied to religion, culture, and society.

In an address of Fashion, it is impossible to leave out the adjacent topics that stem from the study of dress. To talk about sartorial practices is to talk about taste, as well as politics and change — themes that reflect back to the socio-semiotic works of Eric Landowski, which will also serve our investigation⁹. Hence, the present work aims at investigating the corset and the hijab in their respective cultural environments, while also examining the socio-political implications of the alternations of absences and presences we aim at identifying and analysing. The relevance of this investigation today is critical, mainly due to the efforts in deconstructing “orientalisms” and “occidentalisms” that are so present in the mainstream discourses, both in academia and the media. By

6 E. Lynn, *Underwear Fashion in Detail*, London, V&A, 2010. V. Steele, *Fetish: fashion, sex and power*, New York and Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1997 ; also V. Steele, *The Corset. A Cultural History*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2001. D. Kunzle, *Fashion and Fetishism. Corsets, tight-lacing and other forms of body-sculpture*, Stroud, Sutton, 2004.

7 L. Ahmed, *A Quiet Revolution*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2011. F. El Guindi, *Veil : modesty, privacy and resistance*, Oxford, Berg, 1999. A. Macleod, *op. cit.* K. Wener, *Between westernization and the veil : contemporary lifestyles of women in Cairo*, Bielefeld, Transcript Verlag, 1997.

8 A.J. Greimas and J. Courtés, *op. cit.*, pp. 157-160.

9 Mainly E. Landowski, *Présences de l'autre*, Paris, P.U.F., 1997.

presenting England and Egypt in parallel, rather than in confrontations, this reflection goes against the grain and proposes an innovative approach to investigating sartorial practices in the West and the Orient, while exposing the contemporary relevance of traditional semiotic approaches.

1. Between West and the Orient : the waves of change

The 1868 Offenbach's opera *La Vie Parisienne* provides us with a statement of unpaired insight : "Blind is the man who cannot see that the form of the corset explains the pattern of social custom"¹⁰. That fragment of the libretto inspired my investigation about the corset in Western Fashion, where I explore the matter of interactions between body and dress, and clothed bodies and other clothed bodies : after analysing the numerous possible combinations of body and dress, including the comings and goings of the corset — or its rhythms of absence and presence — the work concludes that, indeed, the form of the corset, as well as its presence or absence, are ingrained in the perception of women, their bodies, and their role in society, while also appearing as an active participant in the interactions of and with different bodies¹¹.

Throughout the semiotic examination of the history of the corset in the West, the work identified some key moments which are well known in the histories of Fashion : the late 19th century, the 1920s, the 1970s and, finally, the aftermath of the 1990s. The 19th century, the beginning of the end for the corset in the West, was marked by its golden age, the Victorian Era, where its use and development peaked, and so did the debate about the pros and cons of that particular item of clothing to female health¹², as well as concerns about the perks of extreme gender-defining dress¹³. The 1920s, the official date of a consolidation of "un-corseting" for women, were marked by the most radical transformation in both dress and in the feminine condition in the West : after the social consequences of World War I, women seemed to distance themselves from the social institutions that marked their existence in society, to construct new ideas of what it means to be a woman. During the 1970s, a strange movement of revival takes place, and subcultural movements¹⁴ look back at the 18th and 19th centuries for inspiration, and particularly the Punk movement brings ironic revivalism of corsets, at the same time bending and exaggerating the previous meaning invested in the garment. Then, last but not least, from the 1990s to our day, corsets become popular again, among celebrities and regular women likewise, as a "trusted" apparatus for shaping the figure, with public figures like Kim Kardashian becoming advocates of the item, influencing thousands of women to practice waist training, bringing a long-forgotten practice back into mainstream culture¹⁵. Following suit, celebrities

10 Cf. E. Lynn, *op. cit.*, p. 73.

11 M. Jardim, *O Corset na Moda Ocidental*, São Paulo, PUC-SP, 2014.

12 D. Kunzle, *Fashion and Fetishism*, *op. cit.*, and V. Steele, *Fetish : fashion, sex and power*, *op. cit.*

13 V. Steele, *The Corset. A Cultural History*, *op. cit.*

14 Following the collection of definitions presented by Dick Hebdige, subcultures are a "mechanism of semantic disorder" (p. 90), through which forbidden contents (such as consciousness of class and difference) are expressed in forbidden forms — particularly codes of dress and group behaviour (p. 91). The term *subculture* refers to the "subterranean" character of youth culture appearing in the post-war, organised in marginal movements that resist the hegemony of mainstream culture, symbolically breaking with the myth of "consensus" in culture and society (p. 18). Cf. D. Hebdige, *Subcultures. The meaning of style*, London, Routledge, 1979.

15 A report about Kim Kardashian and tight lacing appeared at the *Medical Daily* on 23rd of August 2014, but the matter of Kardashian and corsets made more news recently after her appearance at the 2019 Met Gala, in which

such as the actress Cara Delavigne and the American fashion models Bella and Gigi Hadid¹⁶ were also spotted wearing the garment on multiple occasions and, since 2016, many well-established Western brands which are at the forefront of leading trends that trickle down to the high street have included corsets in their collections, such as Prada, McQueen, Dion Lee, Burberry, and Tom Ford, and even the American fast-fashion retailer Forever 21 embraced the corset trend in 2018.

Perhaps not strangely at all, Leila Ahmed identifies the same key periods as tipping points for the veil in Egypt. In her work *A Quiet Revolution*, the scholar aims to reconstruct the recent history of the practice of veiling, mapping the process of unveiling occurring in Egypt and other Muslim majority countries, all the way to the present return to veiling, which the author names “the veil’s resurgence”¹⁷. Following the panorama Ahmed presents, the custom of veiling too tipped in the 19th century, and then slowly started to dissolve as a consequence of the European colonial occupation of Egypt, where not only a strong presence of Westerners made Western dress part of the landscape but it was also during that period that the idea of Westernisation as progress began to gain speed ; in the 1920s, the process of unveiling is led by the ruling elite, and for women coming to age between the 1920s and the 1960s, not wearing a veil becomes the norm¹⁸. It is in the 1970s, however, that Islamist groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood started to gain strength¹⁹, and the revival and resignification of the veil starts to take place, acquiring subcultural tones and marking a separation between “regular” and “radical” Muslims²⁰. Finally, from the late 1990s to date, the hijab expanded from the Islamist subcultural space and made its entrance back into the mainstream, both in Egypt, other Muslim majority countries²¹, and even in the West, also having influencers and celebrities advocating its use, as well as a growing presence in contemporary advertising.

From the start, it is possible to argue that there is not much surprise in this perfect overlapping, since Egypt was, after all, a Westernised nation after the 19th century, and also an active participant in the world order at the time : if, as a country, Egypt was subjected to the same cultural and economic contexts as the West, it is only natural that the feminist waves would more or less align in both places, as well as the manifestations of change through dress resulting from it. However, it is imperative to remark that, if in England the period discussed was marked by declining religiosity and the consolidation and strengthening of capitalism — which would provide the perfect conditions for the strengthening of Fashion, even counter-cultural “fashion” which was, curiously, marked by

the celebrity wore a traditional corset. A headline from 7th of May 2019, appearing in the *Women’s Health Magazine* reads “People Are Freaking Out About How Small Kim Kardashian’s Waist Looks In Her Met Gala Corset Dress.”

¹⁶ Delavigne made it to the news in the world known fashion magazine *Harpers Bazar* for her look merging a Little Black Dress with an embedded corset in the September 2019 edition, which echoes her appearance in the Amazon Prime historical show “Carnival Row,” featuring the actress wearing corsets. And the October 2016 fashion magazine *Cosmopolitan* broke the news that Gigi Hadid is following Kim Kardashian’s “lead” on a major corset trend. Since then, both Gigi and Bella Hadid were spotted wearing multiple corset looks, including an original vintage 1993 Vivienne Westwood worn by the model Bella Hadid to New York Fashion week, according to the September 2019 *Vogue*.

¹⁷ L. Ahmed, *op. cit.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ L. Ahmed, *op. cit.* ; A. Macleod, *op. cit.* ; L.F. Maloul, *op. cit.* ; K. Werner, *op. cit.*

²¹ L.Ahmed, *op. cit.*, and E. Tarlo, *Visibly Muslim : fashion, politics, faith*, Oxford, Berg, 2010.

conspicuous consumption likewise²² — Egypt took the opposite turn : not only their address of social and economic issues revolves around what authors name “Arab socialism”, which uses Islam selectively to justify its practices²³ but mainly, an environment in which religion was strengthened as a grounding social practice is constructed. Hence, even if a broader global context can partially explain the similar trajectories of our objects, the local contexts couldn’t be more diverse from one another.

More importantly, we can learn from the key moments listed above that, from the late 1890s to our day, both corset and hijab had the chance of literally meaning “everything to everyone” : from normative dress to revolutionary uniform and back, both garments were invested with different values, resignified multiple times, while also suffering operations of desemantisation and resemantisation, or the loss of value followed by the recovery of the initial value invested in the object²⁴. Similarly, when regarding particularly the case of Western Fashion, there is also the intersection between Western Fashion and “Oriental” dress — which, in Great Britain today, is labelled as “modest fashion”, an umbrella term that comprises any sort of intentional modesty in the presentation of self, including religions beyond Islam. To discuss that particular form of remixing both systems, however, is not the object of the present investigation, although we have presented an analysis elsewhere in which the matter of converging traditions in dress is debated²⁵. Those semantic trajectories are particularly interesting for the present investigation, because they help to deconstruct the “confusion” of meaning that both corset and hijab provoke in those who apprehend corseted and veiled bodies : between composed tradition and rebellious disobedience, the same item of dress has done it all and, in our day and age, it can be hard to decide whether the wearer of one or the other is embodying traditional affiliation or ironic non-compliance.

Nonetheless, and to conclude this initial exposition, it is important to discuss the extent to which those waves of absence and presence, which are either followed or occasioned by different semantic investments, contribute to or grow from transformations in the feminine role in each society ; or yet, if they embody a fight for change, which relate to the condition of women but, particularly in the hijab’s case, also manifest the claims for equality for a religious group. Likewise, it is possible to see that those trajectories align with moments of socio-economic crisis, meaning that the desire for change is bonded to a historical context, in which the transformation of the dress of the woman has appeared, historically and repetitively, as a flag denouncing broader social change.

2. Presence, absence, and return

Through the key moments presented above, it is possible to point at an interesting characteristic relating to the corpus we are discussing : that *absence* rather than presence (or return) of the objects is more broadly perceived as *change*, whereas the permanence or reintroduction of the objects are currently related to either “persistence of the same” or “retrospectiveness”, to which a sour feeling is

22 D. Hebdige, *op. cit.*

23 A. Macleod, *op. cit.* ; L.F. Maloul, *op. cit.* ; K. Wener, *op. cit.*

24 A.J. Greimas and J. Courtés, “Désémantisation”, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

25 M. Jardim, “Beyond the freedom vs oppression opposition : the meaning of the Londoner hijabista look”, *Greimas aujourd’hui : l’avenir de la structure* (Actes du congrès de l’Association française de sémiotique), Paris, AFS, 2019, pp. 758-768.

associated, the idea that Fashion cannot *invent* anything new anymore, but merely repeat and remix itself.

The matter of Fashion and change, both in sartorial practices and in the prevalence of political ideas, is discussed by Eric Landowski in *Présences de l'autre* : for him, fashion is a mechanism of regulation of social time, which produces and reproduces identities by imprinting a *rhythm* to a collective *becoming*²⁶. The individual tendency to follow this rhythm is interpreted as a compulsion for feeling (for oneself) and making manifest (for others) the fact that one is “present to the present” : as the author puts it, the strength of this appeal is that of a “presentification of the present”²⁷ ; hence “the virtue of inchoateness”²⁸. Adopting what appears as a new form in a given domain (that of clothing, eating, speaking, or even thinking) provides us with a means to attest our being part of our times. The rhythm of Fashion, thus, appears as the medium through which change is both produced and sustained. But “change” in itself is nothing but the suspension moment between the terminative aspect of a given process and the beginning of its renewal or restarting under some relatively new form (inchoateness) : the point of intersection that binds an end to a new beginning, or the discontinuity that separates a before and an after²⁹. This confirms the idea that rather than the specific substance of what is changing through the dynamic of Fashion, what matters first is its very dynamic — the rhythm Fashion conveys to the alternation of presence and absence.

Still, even if the “changes” are not radical or complete, Fashion is made of constant ruptures. As I analysed in my work about the corset, the long persistence of the same sartorial Fashion can be homologated to the persistence of other manners³⁰, including life itself, politics, and even religion, whereas fast-paced changes like the ones lived in our times are also aligned, if not with change *de facto*, at least to a constant *desire* for change. When regarding a timeline of Fashion with its many ruptures, it is evident that while the duration is perceived as dysphoric, punctuality is exalted both from a business perspective — more change equals more sales — as well as for those who follow Fashion : to be able to catch up with the many alternating vogues and to be perceived as someone who is always presented according to the latest trends means to be in tune with the times but also to be part of the elite *creating* the times, the innovators and early adopters who push trends forward and help to disseminate them.

Looking at our corpus, we see (at least) two possibilities of interpreting the alternation of absence and presence. From a diachronic perspective, every trend has, to an extent, a form of duration. Hence, the beginning of a trend (for example, the change in the season, or the moment when the first early adopters start to be spotted parading a new look) is marked by inchoateness ; the adoption by the mainstream is marked by duration, but it also contains in itself the announcement of the terminative aspect : the saturation of a look creates the need for something new. However, when zooming out Fashion history, both corset and hijab display much more moments of presence than absence in the

26 E. Landowski, “Mode, politique et changement”, in *Présences de l'autre*, *op. cit.*, pp. 120-121.

27 *Op. cit.*, p. 127.

28 *Op. cit.*, p. 134. The author refers to Georg Simmel’s essay, “La mode” (1895), in *La tragédie de la culture et autres essais*, trad. Paris, Rivages, 1988.

29 *Ibid.*

30 M. Jardim, *O Corset na Moda Ocidental*, *op. cit.*

feminine wardrobe. In that sense, it is possible to analyse that both the inchoateness and terminativeness are aspects connected to the early stages of a subcultural presence, as well as the complete dissemination of the garments in the mainstream which marks the necessary end of a trend ; whereas the brief periods of absence of one form or another of corset and hijab can be interpreted as the brief suspension, the discontinuity interpreted as change that marks the end before the return. Even further, the different aspects can be homologated to different meanings invested in the garment : the subcultural rupture bringing the flavour of inchoateness ; the (re)adoption of the garments by the Fashion system the durative aspect ; whereas the complete mainstreamed saturation of a look contains in itself the perfectiveness, the completed cycle of an object or trend that carries the announcement of change, or the preparation of another rupture — a moment of suspension that is marked by the absence of the objects.

Although Landowski remarks that the Fashion changes can be understood as capricious, responding to a need for Fashion to justify its own existence³¹, different from the changes in politics which systematically claim to respond to “real needs”³², more and more it has become evident that the link between changes in dress and changes in society is marked — particularly when it comes to the conditions of women. In the case analysed, there are at least three layers of social discourse to be taken into consideration when investigating the relations of presence, absence and return of the corset and the hijab : the sartorial discourse, which is commonly associated with the word “fashion” ; the political discourse linking forms of dress to forms of femininity and its socio-cultural narratives ; and, finally, the social and religious discourse, comprising both Christian and Islamic ideals of femininity, as well as ideas of social class and distinction, and the conformity with or rejection of those ideals. Each of the layers of Fashion persistence and change corresponds to one of the levels of Greimas’ generative trajectory : the surface or discursive level, the narrative level and the abstract or fundamental level³³.

The first layer is the visual manifestation of Fashion, and the most evident matter of our investigation : at some (or most?) times in the section of history we are analysing, women wore constraining foundation wear in the West or veils in the Orient, and at rare times, they went uncorseted or unveiled ; after those brief vogues, corset and hijab found their way back into the mainstream via subcultural movements, resuming their permanence and parading changes in their visual manifestation — those could be changes in the shape of the silhouette, or in the manner of wearing the veil. Those visual manifestations are the vehicles that put in discourse the fundamental values and narrative mechanisms underneath those garments (no pun intended) and, as much as written text does, possess syntactic and semantic components.

Secondly, when we start discussing ideas of femininity, or the extent to which corset and veil construct femininities through their actions over the body and over others who apprehend those clothed bodies, our investigation has reached the narrative level, in which utterances (*énoncés*) articulate relation-functions between at least two actants³⁴ : it is at the narrative level that values are

³¹ “Mode, politique...”, *op. cit.*, p. 114, 135.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 114, 139.

³³ Cf. A.J. Greimas and J. Courtés, *op. cit.*, “Génératif (Parcours)”, p. 160 ; “Sémantique”, pp. 328-332 ; “Syntaxe”, pp. 379-381.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 382.

actualised via their junction with subjects. If we accept that as much as “human” subjects do, dress can play the role of actant-subject, an analysis of the narrative level of corset and hijab in relation of presence and absence in Fashion can produce different utterances, which concern both the relations established between body and dress, and the relations between clothed-body and other subjects.

Finally, the fundamental level is where the elementary structures of signification categories are articulated : “...a type of organised space comprising the inter-defined terms over which the syntactic operations take place...”³⁵. In other words, in the level formed by abstract values that are still virtualised, the subjects find an inventory of categories that can be exploited in the narrative level. This “inventory” is formed by “pure”, “undressed” value that is not yet articulated in intersubjective exchanges, or given a textual or visual manifestation. In the present case, there are at least three possible, overlapping categories which both concern and unite our objects : upper class / lower class, seclusion / freedom, orthodoxy / rebellion. Throughout the historical moments presented in the corpus, the relations of absence and presence can be homologated to those different categories but, as we approach the movements of return, there are transformations and resignifications of the objects in which the values can converge or become blurred, building contradictory relations.

In this particular work, we opted for presenting our analysis from the abstract level to the surface structures, rather than starting from the manifestation. That choice serves two purposes : firstly, to show how values present in a given society surface through the mechanisms that are enabled by Fashion ; however, secondly and chiefly, our intention was to avoid indulging in the prevalent practices of “looking for the meaning” of different forms of dress, a saturated approach in the study of dress and identities today. Regarding our trajectory “backwards” also gives us the chance of looking at both objects beyond the layers of stereotypes and clichés that, unfortunately, blur the judgment of so many authors when they opt for addressing the past or the Orient.

2.1. The values of Fashion

It is practically a consensus among theoreticians concerned with the corset and the hijab³⁶, that the primary value associated with those garments — even before femininity or religiousness — links to *class affiliation*. Particularly in the 19th century, where our trajectory starts, those values were the strongest in both social milieus, with both corset and hijab marking the affiliation to the upper classes. The category seclusion / freedom, thus, overlaps with the values of class, with the “domesticity” created by the corset being immediately bound to the idea of class distinction through its association with the absence of manual labour outside of the home, whereas the secluded covered woman symbolised the higher status of the husband, which allowed his wife (or wives) to be maintained, rather than being required to contribute to the generation of income. Similarly, the move to an absence of those garments culminating in the 1920s is not a “revolt of the masses” against apparatuses promoting a separation of the social strata, but a movement of the ruling elites at both ends : the “uncorseting” in Western Fashion starts among the so-called “socialites” — women who are famous

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 380.

³⁶ See above, respectively, footnotes 8, and Th. Veblen, *The theory of the leisure class*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007, and 9 as well as F. Mernissi, *Beyond the veil : male-female dynamics in Muslim society*, London, Saqi, 2011.

for being wealthy and fashionable, normally used by designers to showcase their creations — as well as artists, and fashion designers, while in Egypt it was led mainly by a well-educated princess.

That movement of the elite is what slowly “trickles down”³⁷ to the majority, creating a more or less homogeneous absence of the garments in both societies — even if there are attempts of return on both sides, such as Christian Dior’s New Look in 1947, that occasioned a brief vogue of Belle Époque silhouettes worldwide and among all classes³⁸, or the persistence of the veil in locations outside of the city centres in Egypt³⁹, as well as in the emergence of Islamic groups that would subsequently be credited with the return to veiling as a mainstream practice. That passage from mainstream presence of both objects to their elite-led absence is also marked by a relation of denial of a value of orthodoxy — both in Religion and Fashion, as well as in social norms — in which an established notion of “appropriate dress” is challenged from the top-down, also questioning the meaning of social distinction through a certain form of dress : is it possible to be distinguished when a vogue is already spread to all the layers of the social strata?

What leads us back to the opposition categories, however, is no longer a movement from the elites that trickles down to the masses, but the movements bred within the lower classes : the return of both corset and hijab into the mainstream is articulated via subcultural practices, such as the Punk in the UK and the Islamist groups in Egypt⁴⁰. Hence, what is mistakenly read as a “return to orthodoxy” is, in fact, the proposition of a new form of both corset and hijab : the first reinterpreting the original meanings and uses of the object through irony ; the second radicalising tradition, creating new manners of living and spreading the religion, pushing the boundaries of Qur’anic prescriptions. Similarly, it is not only the fact that those movements are bred in the mid- to lower-classes that makes them oppose the value of upper-classness : for both forms of subcultures, the upper classes are perceived as something that needs to be opposed : either because of their role of “oppressors” of the working class in England, or because they are perceived as morally corrupted by money and Western values in Egypt. As for the seclusion / freedom category, even if the objects were formerly associated with domesticity, the return of those garments is followed by a reinvestment of values that reverses the meaning of the object : in the Punk, corsets become synonyms of explicit and intentional *amoral* behaviour, which includes an exaggeration of feminine sexuality manifested by the constriction of the waist ; whereas, for Islamist groups, the act of veiling is used as an instrument of conquering freedom to take the streets, sustaining a symbolic seclusion marked by the covering that is used, in its turn, to enable the presence of women outside the home : being covered means being able to go to work or study outside of the house, without sacrificing the values of modesty and piety that are prescribed by the group’s take on the Qur’an.

Finally, the trajectory of our three categories ends with another contradiction, the appropriation of the subcultural movements back into the mainstream. In Western Fashion, from the 1990s onwards

³⁷ Th. Veblen, *op. cit.*

³⁸ Cf. E. Pulajet-Plàa, “New Look”, *Encyclopedia of Clothing and Fashion*, Farmington Hills, Thomson Gale, 2005, and V. Steele, *Fifty years of fashion : new look to now*, London and New Haven, Yale University Press, 2000.

³⁹ L. Ahmed, *op. cit.* ; A. Macleod, *op. cit.*

⁴⁰ Cf. respectively D. Hebdige, *op. cit.*, V. Steele, *op. cit.*, and L. Ahmed, *op. cit.*, A. Macleod, *op. cit.*, K. Wener, *op. cit.*

and still clocking, not only Punk is used as a reference or inspiration by contemporary designers year in year out, but the corset worn as outerwear makes periodic returns, alternating between vintage looks retrospective of the 1950s, and rougher looks with references to Goth and BDSM (Bondage Discipline Sadism Masochism) groups ; if that was not enough, corsets as underwear have been regaining space in the mainstream as well, with recent celebrity endorsements from the Kardashian clan, who claim to use the garment regularly to achieve long term tighlacing goals⁴¹, resulting in visibility of the garment in the media, as well as a marked presence both in the luxury market and in the brands consumed by the average woman, a trend that peaked in 2018. Comparably, the form of Islam advocated by Islamist groups in the 1970s also inspired a mainstream return of hijabs in the Arab world — which includes countries where the garment is not required by law — and even in the West ; meanwhile, the Western Fashion industry has opened its arms to headscarves likewise, with the garment appearing in the same American and European popular high street retailers, as well as luxury brands : the Italian fashion house Dolce & Gabbana, for instance, and their first Abaya collection in 2016, which was followed by regular lines launched every year ; the Swedish fast-fashion multinational company H&M, launching a modest line in 2018 (and being the first to feature a Muslim hijabi model in their campaigns in 2015), as well as the UK based fast-fashion brand River Island, promoting the hijab and modest wear in their 2018 line ; and even the sportswear giant Nike has recently launched their “hijab pro”. As both garments become associated with consumption, rather than idealistic political movements, their “meaning” becomes diluted again, denying the radicalism of the movements while reconstructing the territory to reinvest the value of class affiliation that started our analysis : those new forms of corset and hijab, now produced by aspirational brands and worn by celebrities and influencers, mark a return to conspicuous consumption as a manner of social distinction, which may also indicate a possible return to seclusion and orthodoxy associated with the garments in the near future.

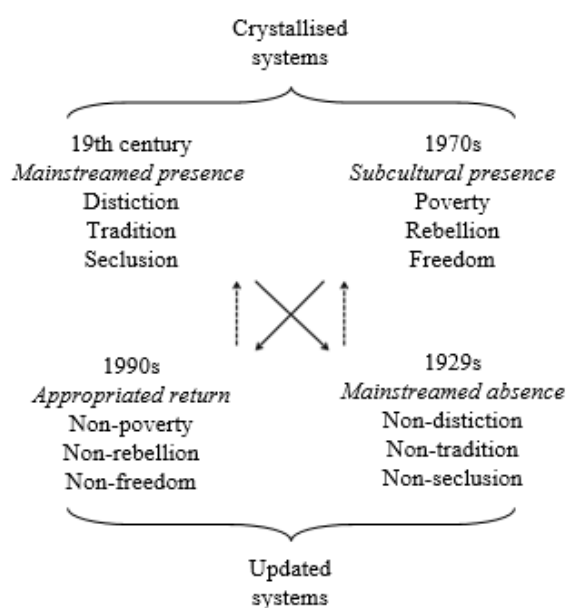


Figure 1. Articulation of the categories.

⁴¹ Cf. *Medical Daily*, art. cit.

2.2. The narratives of women and others : clothing femininities

However, how are the multi-layered virtual values presented in the previous items actualised in relations between subjects? Although both societies in the discussed periods are heavily heteronormative and grounded in couple-centric social relations, the modern history of dress is our witness that “change” is always more emphatically inflicted in the dress of the woman, as much as those changes are frequently followed by large debate — in politics and, subsequently, the media — about the kind of “behaviour” a certain vogue of dress will produce. Hence, it is not difficult to deduce that the utterances (*énoncés*) of state and doing (*faire*) relate to make-doing (*faire-faire*) and make-being (*faire-être*) the *woman*. At a first glance, all the positions in the categories presented previously can be understood in terms of exchange of values in the strict sense of the standard theory : a series of manipulations⁴² in which the presence and absence of the garments aim at make-doing both their “users” and the ones around them.

The first set of values homologated to the 19th-century vogues present a narrative structure in which the corset and the veil appear either as the “hand” of a social Sender, or “Addresser” (*Destinateur*⁴³), or assuming the role of senders of the female figure, social behaviour, and religious duty. Through the corset, the body appears competentialised to perform the role of maternity⁴⁴ which is manifested through the emphasis on the hip area the silhouette creates, promoting both an enlargement of the hips which are currently associated with fertility, while also increasing the visibility of the waist-hip area in the plastic arrangement of the toilette. The idea of the woman as a mother-to-be links, of course, to a traditional Christian idea of femininity.

The idea of the veil in the 19th-century Egypt is not distant from the English narrative of the corset : the covering of the head (and sometimes the face) marks social distinction that is acquired, in Islam, through the roles of wife and mother⁴⁵. Similarly to the corset, the veil marks the acquisition of competence to perform those roles in compliance with social norms, marking the superior status of the free woman (opposed to a slave), or secluded wife. In both cases, the presence of the items of dress marks the conjunction of the subject woman with the values of upper-classness, seclusion and orthodoxy, a bond that is euphoric both from individual and social perspectives : the values manifested by those forms of dress are the ones presented by religion as the very foundation of society and culture ; hence, complying with those values means contributing to the continuity of society. That particular moment — as previously mentioned, a “tipping point” for both objects at their respective locations — marks the end of an era in which the deep values in the category presented are fully stabilised and disseminated in society, creating almost a consensus about the link between values and garments.

42 A.J. Greimas and J. Courtés, *op. cit.*, “Manipulation”, pp. 220-222.

43 *Ibid.*, « Destinateur », pp. 94-95.

44 Cf. M. Jardim, *O Corset na Moda Ocidental*, *op. cit.*, and *id.*, “The corset and the veil as disruptive manifestations of clothing : the tightlaced and the Tuareg”, *dObras*, XII, 25, 2019.

45 Cf. M.A.S. Abdel Haleem, *The Qur'an. A new translation*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2004. The surah “Women” (*Al-Nisa'*) discusses the manners in which property should be divided among women and men as well as the fair treatment of wives, but there are extensive mentions in other *surahs* about the roles of women as wives and mothers.

When the elites start to give up those values to propose new forms of femininity, there appears to be an attempt for a reversal of roles, in which women aim at taking over as senders, resorting to a renunciation of values invested in the objects, through rejecting those items of dress at the level of sartorial discourse. That transformation is one of the most significant in the histories of Fashion we are analysing, because the rupture with the objects of dress, at the narrative level, is related to a true transformation in the role of women — which could, unfortunately, explain why those vogues are so brief and rare in the trajectory of feminine dress. That agency produces utterances in which women pass from a regime in which the garment makes-do their bodies and themselves, to the search of a new model in which the garment's role is not as marked, or appears as a helper rather than a master : in the West, the utilitarian style of Gabrielle Chanel is the most emblematic of that new narrative of feminine dress, whereas in the Orient, it is the adoption of Western Fashions and their self-professed values of “modernity”, which included more progressive forms of femininities.

But as mentioned previously, that movement was born and bred in the upper-classes, still responding to mechanisms through which the elites dictate Fashion and social norms to the lower classes, which are supposed to follow and catch up. Hence, the moment of subcultural return of both corset and veil seems to continue the discourse in which bodies take the role of sender, which is marked by a form of “destruction” of the corset and veil as they used to be, or as they were used by the upper classes until the 19th-century, to recreate a regime in which the bodies make do the corset and veil : by creating new meanings, the subcultural take on those sartorial objects displaces their use and context, making the objects mean irony, rebellion ; or extreme, radical religiosity, all of which belong outside the scope of mainstreamed social practices. In that sense, the manner in which authors name the return to hijab in Egypt “the new veiling”⁴⁶ couldn't be more appropriate : it isn't only the visual appearance of the veil that is new, but the narrative regime that governs the relation between body and dress is also transformed.

Finally, the (re)appropriation of subcultural values into the Fashion system causes a re-reversal of the narrative discourse, returning the status of sender to the garments and transforming the body into a follower of trends, performing an appropriation, in reference to Fashion's ability to “highjack” manifestations belonging to cultural contexts outside of itself. Not only, in the Fashion systems, the garments make-do the bodies that then become competentialised to display the “present now” of each new vogue, but it is through the consumption of those objects that the values linking to belonging are actualised. Thus, the 19th-century and the post-1990s form a deixis of the garment as the sender of the body, whereas the absence of the garments and their subcultural manifestations construct narrative utterances in which corset and hijab are receivers (*destinataires*) of the bodies which take control over the interactions. It could be argued that the 1920s and 1970s are marked by bodies and subjects that are more “subjectal”, whereas in the 19th century and the post-1990s the bodies are more “objectal” in the narrative discourse, which is followed by an increase of the subjectal status of garments. Such relation doesn't appear mistaken when we see the peak of consumption today, and the power certain brands still hold in the consumer's imagination — not to mention the large volume of retrospective

46 Cf. L. Ahmed, *op. cit.* ; A. Macleod, *op. cit.* ; L.F. Maloul, *op. cit.*

exhibitions in English Fashion museums that aim at reviving the golden age of Haute Couture and Royal Dress.

Traditional narrative discourse of acquisition or loss of values, however, does not exhaust the analysis of our objects' narrative levels. Following the works of Landowski, it is also possible to homologate our square of values invested in the corset and hijab at different times with different regimes of interactions⁴⁷. In fact, an analysis presented elsewhere addresses a similar problem relating to the appropriation of subcultural and religious manifestations by mainstream fashion, debating how the different regimes of interaction can be homologated to different moments of the trajectory of both garments⁴⁸. At the same time, the passages from one regime to the other not only outline the transformations in the discourse governing femininities and their intersubjective exchanges with others through clothed bodies, but also the transformations in the points of view linked to the changes in Fashion.

The positions of *programming* and *manipulation* appear forming the mechanisms utilised by the Fashion System, including the trickle down and bubble up effects, manifesting relations of lower risk in between Fashion and its followers, whereas the positions of *accident* and *adjustment* form the Anti-Fashion tools belonging to subcultural movements or elite-led breaks with the rhythm of Fashion, manifesting relations of higher risk between subjects and Fashion.

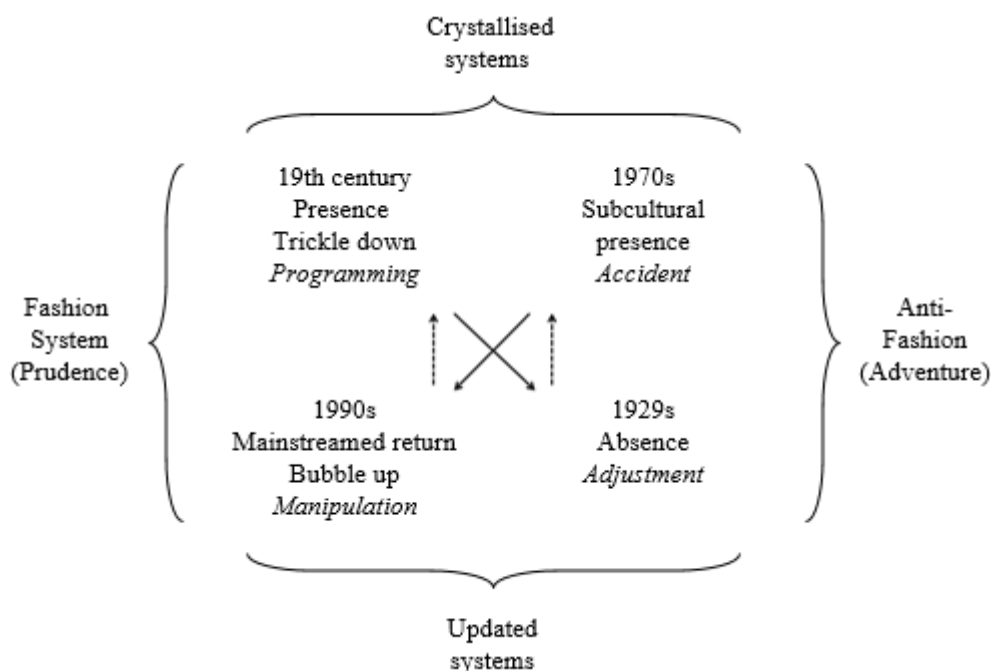


Figure 2. Interaction regimes and Fashion systems.

In the present context, *programming* appears as a regime that corresponds to the 19th century — the moment when the investment of values was fully consolidated, and so were the thematic roles of women that became entangled with both objects. Besides the programmed thematic interactions, in which the agency of subjects is fairly reduced, there is a concept from the economic theory of Thorstein

47 Cf. *Les interactions risquées*, Limoges, Pulim, 2005.

48 "The corset and the veil...", *art. cit.*

Veblen, the “trickle-down effect”, that appears as governing the Fashion “transactions” taking place in the 19th century : each vogue is created and consolidated in the upper classes, and then it is dictated from the top to the bottom of society, meaning that the lower classes follow the manners and fashions of the “high society”⁴⁹. Again, that can be read as compliance with established programmes and thematic roles, in which each social class remains in their own set of rules and expected actions, corroborating the maintenance of culture and its status quo.

As it couldn’t be different, the 1920s movement of unveiling and uncorseting is generated among the elites, equally “trickling down” to the bottom. However, before this vogue became “fashion” — before that particular manner was disseminated and consensually adopted in society — the first women to live a fast flapper lifestyle in England, or the first members of Egyptian royalty to go unveiled and wearing the latest Western fashion experienced a moment of *adjustment* : the pure interaction between social subjects without the exchange of *any* objects of value. That pure, non-mediated relationship comprises both the newly found forms of dress and the freedom they provided to the body — for women who indeed *abandoned* the corset, rather than being born in that vogue, or for the women who indeed *unveiled*, that experience was the most significant — as well as a new form of relationships with the surroundings including other subjects, in a moment of suspension of the established social rules, before a new set of social codes was organised and consolidated.

As for the 1970s, that is perhaps one of the most challenging moments of our corpus, mainly because there are internal counter-movements that mix social upheaval and revolution with the recovery of objects that are (still) associated with backwardness. Both the Punk and the Islamic Revival appear as the union of both directions, as if the movements danced in between extreme rupture and extreme compliance. The regime of *accident* appears in many different aspects of those movements, in what can be defined as the co-incidence of narrative programmes that were not previously connected. Firstly, both movements manifest an attempt at disengaging with the “main programme” of mainstream society, creating the conditions for accidents to appear. Secondly, there is a disentanglement of the programmes of the objects, removing them from their “original” contexts — the corset as an insignia of leisure and upper-classness ; the veil as an object of the distinguished, wealthy Egyptian women — and re-introducing the garments in contexts where those programmes are not fully disseminated. And finally, in the relations established between body and dress, since both objects ceased to be part of the routine attire of women, the re-encounter with those objects becomes a form of co-incidence likewise.

Finally, as we re-enter our era, the appropriation of subcultural values ends our diagram in the regime of *manipulation*, one that recovers the traditional discourse in which values are exchanged, which is typical of economic relations that mark the Fashion system today. Like the multiple accidents involved in the subcultural level of our corpus, the level in which subcultural discourse is re-appropriated into the Fashion system is also multi-layered, comprising different levels in which consumers, designers and, somehow, the garments themselves need to be persuaded. First of all, there is the matter of reversing the “off-putting” values that the subcultures carry for the mainstream society — the agenda of both the Punk and the Muslim Brotherhood was none other than the destruction of

⁴⁹ *The theory of the leisure class*, op. cit.

mainstream society — a work fashion has to do repeatedly so that it can convince its followers to abide by the latest trends. Resorting, again, to Fashion theory, the operation enabling this change in the perception of objects, or the looking at street style and allowing it to influence high fashion, is named the “bubble up effect”, which is the opposite of the trickle-down mechanism⁵⁰. And, last but not least, the reintroduction of such objects into mainstream fashion produces a series of manipulations in the interactions between body and dress, which is linked to a transformation in the garment’s meaning for each individual — which contributes to the “semantic versatility”⁵¹ of corset and hijab, and the consequent difficulty in reading what each wearer means to manifest.

Each deixis forms a “constellation” which is based on the relation established between the risk of interaction and the production of meaning, defined respectively “prudence” and “adventure”⁵². In our analysis, those constellations are translated into the spaces of Fashion and the mechanisms working for its production and reproduction (prudence), and Anti-Fashion, or vogues that aim at attacking the Fashion system (adventure). When visualised in that manner, the ellipsis shows not only that there must be alternations in between compliance and rebellion, but also that one feeds on the other : Fashion both creates the spaces for its own destruction, and uses it as the “fuel” to renew and strengthen its system.

2.3. Sartorial utterances

The most superficial level of our objects, or the manifestation we previously identified as the visual / plastic layer of the discourse, belongs to the so-called discursive level : the space where actants are invested in discursive actors, as well as where the figurativisation of values takes place. When it comes to corset and hijab, the analysis can take place in at least two distinct manners : the most evident, the visual and plastic elements of the objects, but also in the discursive mechanisms used to examine verbal written text, such as the actorialisation, temporalisation, and spatialisation. In fact, it is our understanding that both dimensions are linked, and that the plastic of the garments is a crucial factor determining what type of relations (or re-actions) can be constructed between different subjects.

As we have seen, the appearance created through the use (or non-use) of corset and hijab are presentifications of values relating to social class, to affiliation (or not) to traditional cultural practices and, ultimately, those manifestations can be read as cues about the secluded or freed status of the woman who wears the garments. At the same time, however, those figurative or plastic codifications of values can also be read at the level of enunciation (*énonciation*)⁵³, with the garments literally putting values in discourse through syntagmatic reorganisations. Nonetheless, the ensemble of an appearance has more to it than the plastic elements forming a look, constructing relations of distance and approximation, while also positioning the wearer in different situations of communication with the world or other subjects.

50 Cf. T. Polhemus, *Streetstyle*, London, PYMCA, 2010, p. 12, and V. Steele, *Fifty years of fashion*, *op. cit.*

51 F. Shirazi, *The veil unveiled : the hijab in modern culture*, Gainesville, University Press of Florida, 2003, p. 7.

52 *Les interactions risquées*, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

53 As distinct from the level of the “utterances” (*énoncés*) which are produced (“enunciated”) by the act of enunciation.

In the West and in the Orient, the plastic constructed through the different vogues of silhouettes of the torso or the head are manifestations of transformations of the body and its “natural” shape : the basic function of the corset is the reshaping of the feminine torso through the repositioning of the body’s matter, creating effects of exaggeration and obliteration of one’s shape, while the hijab, besides determining if the wearer’s head and/or face is covered or uncovered, also promotes a transformation in the size and the shape of the head. In the three forms of presence analysed in this corpus — the normative / mainstreamed 19th century ; the subcultural return of the 1970s ; and the return to mainstream Fashion in the aftermath of the 1990s — both objects work over the female body in a similar manner, exaggerating the shapes of the torso / head creating, chiefly, relations that guide the gaze of the viewer(s) towards the areas over which the garments act. Besides being symbolically bound to ideas of normative femininity — the domestic bourgeois or upper-class Victorian woman, as well as the secluded Muslim wife — the plasticity of the garments also determines, in act, the manner in which such bodies should be looked at, or interacted with. It is not only a question of culturally constructed meaning, but a matter of situation : even if constrained waists are the norm in a social milieu, the particular configuration of the body promoted by the corset invites the gaze of the other to that area of the body, whereas the complexly folded headscarves, draped in layers of see-through fabrics, equally invite the gaze to the head of the covered body.

Similarly, the manner in which bodies are constructed by corset and hijab produces forms of actorialisation, temporalisation and spatialisation imposed to the wearer : a dressed body, according to Fashion or against it, displays a heavily altered silhouette, inviting the enunciatee to take the proper distance to better apprehend the amalgamation *clothed-body*. Particularly in the 19th century, the almost statuesque appearances constructed by corsets and veils places the clothed-body in an elsewhere / then, constructing the proper distance between women and others. The same operation is repeated in the subcultural movements — almost a form of “self-segregation”, removing oneself from the body of mainstream society ; and, equally, in the body of high-Fashion — the body of the “catwalk” and of the photographs, in magazines or online, to always be seen as image, always as utterance (*énoncé*) and never as an act of *enunciation*.

Hence, the suspension of the presence of both objects becomes the source of profound transformation in the manner in which bodies are looked at. If both sartorial objects — and no matter whether their presence is mainstreamed or subcultural — produce prescriptive manners of gazing at, guiding the eyes of the observer to particular parts of the body, the absence of the same objects promotes bodies that are *not* secluded or traditional, but also invites freer forms of visual interactions to unravel, without the coded manners the shaping of the body determines. When regarded from that angle, it is possible to see that, while the presence of corset and hijab, as well as the prescriptive manners they construct produce objectifying relations, projecting a time and space of reference around the subject, their absence seems to literary *free* the body, placing it in a here / now or, to use Landowski’s words, “suppressing the distance between the I ‘being’ and the I ‘been’”⁵⁴. The presence and absence of the garments, hence, can be homologated with the procedures of disengagement (or “shifting out”, *débrayage*) and engagement (or “shifting in”, *embrayage*), with Fashion using the

⁵⁴ *La société réfléchie*, Paris, Seuil, 1989, p. 57 (our translation).

presence of the objects not only to organise the time of History, but the times of the subject in their interactions with others, while the absence — or *change* — appears as what suspends the markers of enunciation, promoting a return to a present now.

Conclusion

The analyses presented in this work link to a research project started in 2015, as a response to my first impressions of the hijab presence when coming to London in 2014⁵⁵. The investigation unfolding since then responds to a desire to deconstruct the prevalent discourse that places the West and the Orient in opposition, departing from a bold proposition : that the corset is, to an extent, the veil of the Western woman. In the present contribution, the concept of Fashion as a cultural apparatus exclusive to the West is questioned : by investigating the same key historical moments, it is possible to see that not only the Orient also has a Fashion in the same moulds of the Western system, but that the trajectories of their most emblematic sartorial objects overlap perfectly, sharing all the levels of a generative trajectory.

Although we explored the possibility of the overlapping being caused by the assimilation of global culture and contexts in Egypt, it was made clear throughout the text that the local contexts are very diverse, ruling out the overlapping as the result of a global “influence” over Egyptian culture. In fact, we have clarified that, in the case of subcultural groups, both nations arrive at manifestations of the same fundamental values through distinctive discourses.

The trajectory of both objects so far points towards a return to tradition and orthodoxy at both locations, which is already announced by the political choices populations are making all over the world. It seems there is a global craving for hard-line conservative politics in many countries, which translates into a desire for a harsher control over the bodies and the spaces or, in the terms of our analysis, to a return to regimes where bodies are distanced from one another, and the social fabric is stratified. Such observations are aggravated by the fact that societies and cultures are more connected than ever, which not only amplifies the power of influence of certain countries over the cultures of others but creates environments in which societies are willing to adopt customs and fashions that make no sense to their cultural past or present context.

Whether the analysis presented in this project can be used to risk predictions about the future — of Fashion and society — or not, our results certainly make a case for an opening when it comes to the established discourses of opposition between the West and the Orient. Due to global “intercultural contamination” or not, an address of Fashion — perhaps one of the central aspects that constructs the feelings of “now-ness” and belonging among members of the same society — proves to be a critical tool in the understanding of social dynamics that go way beyond the appearance and the sartorial presentation of individuals. In the past of our theory, the approximations between Fashion and language, grammar, identity and politics⁵⁶ shows us the manners in which the rhythmic alternations of

55 M. Jardim, “Humility and Identity : First Impressions of the Hijab Presence in London”, *Proceedings CIMODE 2016 – 3^o Congresso Internacional de Moda e Design*, 2016.

56 A.J. Greimas, *La Mode en 1830*, Paris, P.U.F., 2000 and *De l'Imperfection*, *op. cit.* ; R. Barthes, *Système de la mode*, Paris, Seuil, 1967 and *The Language of Fashion*, Oxford, Berg, 2006 ; J.-M. Floch, “Esthétique et éthique du ‘total look’ de Chanel”, *Identités visuelles*, Paris, P.U.F., 1995 ; E. Landowski, “Mode, politique et changement”, *Présences de l'autre*, *op. cit.*

manners are ingrained into the social fabric, acting not as a “reflex” of a historical moment, but appearing as a force that mutually forms the manifestations of the present⁵⁷. Our investigation places another stone in that journey, aiming for a study of Fashion as a system that is not exclusive to one culture or society, but that builds rhythms that are shared by locations that may seem disconnected but have, if nothing else, at least one thing in common : the insatiable appetite for change.

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⁵⁷ A.C. de Oliveira, “Visualidade processual da aparência”, in *id.* and Kathia Castilho (eds.), *Corpo e Moda. Por uma compreensão do contemporâneo*, São Paulo, Estação das Letras e Cores, 2008.

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